

Not only does this bill give the FEC its full funding request, but it also includes three sensible provisions that will help the FEC operate more efficiently.

Last night, I was proud to stand with my good friend and colleague from Maryland in supporting the Shays-Meehan campaign finance reform bill.

By passing this bill today, we will help the FEC—the agency that is charged with enforcing our campaign finance laws—operate in a more efficient manner and better enforce the law.

It is also worth noting that the FEC provisions in this bill are very similar to language that was included in the Thomas substitute debated last night.

At that time, the gentleman from Maryland very wisely suggested that we should pass the Thomas substitute tomorrow.

In this bill, he seems to be getting at least part of his wish.

So I applaud the gentleman from Maryland, and the gentleman from Arizona for their bipartisan leadership on this issue.

I am also happy to note that an expanded version of my Right to Breastfeed amendment was accepted by the Conference Committee.

This landmark bill will ensure a woman's right to breastfeed her child on any federal property. For too long, new mothers have been shooed away from federal buildings, national parks, national museums, and federal agencies simply because they were feeding a child.

Until now, they have had little recourse. Now, the law of the land will be clear: The federal government supports a woman's decision to breastfeed her child.

I want to thank my colleagues LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD, CHRISTOPHER SHAYS, and CONNIE MORELLA, who worked closely with me on this bill.

I am pleased to see that the conference committee retained contraceptive coverage for federal employees provision from last year. This is a victory for women of reproductive age, who routinely pay 68% more than men in out of pocket health care costs. This will also go a long way toward reducing unwanted pregnancies and therefore reduce abortions.

I would also like to commend my good friend and colleague CONNIE MORELLA of Maryland, who has been a leader on child care issues, got a version of her bill, H.R. 206, included in this conference report.

I was very pleased to support this provision allowing executive branch agencies to use their existing funds to help provide child care service for their employees.

I congratulate her for that, and I applaud the conference committee for treating child care issues with such importance.

This bill shows how much we can accomplish for the American people when we work together on a bipartisan basis. I congratulate my colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Mr. PASCRELL. Mr. Speaker, there is much in this bill that I find to be particularly worthy. Unlike last year, when the Members of this House fought for months over the details of this legislation, the conferees were able to return a final product to this House that a majority of people on both sides of the aisle could support. In particular, I am pleased that this Congress has finally provided our hard working federal employees a 4.8% pay raise. The pay gap between government workers that

make this country function and white collar workers in the private sector grows every year. This situation, which failed to be redressed until this year, has negatively impacted the hundreds of thousands of households that are headed by government employees. As a result of the bipartisan agreement embodied by this conference report, thousands of government workers will have an easier time making ends meet.

The Conference Report on H.R. 2490 also contains several other important provisions. First, it makes good on the promise that this Congress made to the American people in the last Congress when we tried to make the Internal Revenue Service more consumer friendly. We do this by fully funding the I.R.S., which will use the funds to continue the administrative reforms necessary to fulfill the intent of H.R. 2676 (P.L. 105-206). It also continues to require health plans that cover federal employees to make contraceptives available as part of their prescription drug coverage. This will assist family planning and reduce abortions. I further applaud the provision in the section funding the United States Customs Service that requires our customs officers to curb the discriminatory treatment of minorities at agency check points, as well as the funding for the crucial fight against drug trafficking.

I could detail more provisions in this conference report that I support, but suffice it to say that I would have voted for this bill had it not been for one provision, the cost of living increase for Members of Congress. For that reason alone, I cast my vote against H.R. 2490.

When I was elected to Congress in 1996, I was, in essence, hired by the people of the Eighth Congressional District of New Jersey. Prior to Election Day 1996, I made an agreement with these people to take the salary of the job that they hired me to do. Implicit in this arrangement was my promise to neither vote for nor accept any pay raise prior to another election. When the Members of this House voted to increase our own salaries in 1997, I voted against it. When my paycheck demonstrated the effect of this pay raise, I returned it to the United States Treasury. My stance on this issue is intensely personal, and I have no expectation that others should follow my lead. It is simply a matter of keeping my word to those I represent.

Unfortunately, my colleagues in the 106th Congress have again deemed it necessary to raise their own pay. This deed was accomplished via the same tactic that was used last year, a procedural vote that I would contend that less than half of the people inside the Beltway understand, much less the American people. This is regrettable. If we are going to raise our own pay, it should be done via a straight up or down vote in circumstances that we can all understand. A pay raise should not be tucked in an appropriations bill that almost all of us could support without its presence. There is much here that I want to support. However, to do so would be to break the agreement that I made with the people of the Eighth Congressional District over two years ago. Many say that your word is your bond and I couldn't agree more. I am not willing to sacrifice mine to make a politically popular vote.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of this conference report on the Treasury-Postal Appropriations bill.

I do so particularly because of two areas of funding in the bill—the first being the important anti-drug efforts of the National Youth Anti-drug Media Campaign and the Drug Free Communities Act. These are both measures that I strongly believe will make a difference in our fight against substance abuse by reducing demand for illegal drugs. These measures are the key to winning the so-called war on drugs.

I am also pleased that this conference report restores funding to reform the IRS. Last year, we passed this historic IRS Restructuring and Reform Act, the most dramatic reform in over 45 years. The Clinton Administration initially opposed the effort but ultimately agreed with a strong, bipartisan majority in this House that reform was needed.

Mr. Speaker, this appropriations bill honors the commitment to reforming the IRS that we made last year. It funds the very important customer service improvements that were mandated by the legislation we passed last year, including a dramatic taxpayer-friendly reorganization of the whole IRS that will improve customer service for every taxpayer—and including the very popular Tele-File program that lets taxpayers file their tax returns much more easily through the telephone.

Second, it funds the desperately needed computer modernization effort. Every Member of this House has heard horror stories, I know I have, from our constituents who have received erroneous computer notices where the left hand of the IRS does not know what the right hand is doing. I have been very critical of the IRS as have other Members. By investing in improved IRS technology, we will be protecting our constituents from the kind of computer problems we have all seen.

We also need to expand access to taxpayer-friendly electronic filing—and this funding will enable us to move forward on that front. Right now there is a 22 percent error rate on paper filing, compared to less than a 1 percent error rate on electronic filing. That is why we mandated that the IRS work hard on electronic filing and in fact we set a goal of 80 percent electronic filing for the IRS by 2007.

Finally, this funding will enable the IRS to complete its Y2K preparations during this calendar year. While the thought of IRS computers crashing may bring glee to the hearts of many, think about the consequences. Think about no refund checks. Think about erroneous IRS notices sent to innocent taxpayers who think they have paid their taxes in a timely way and in an appropriate way. Think about the unnecessary audits that might result. This appropriations bill gives the IRS the tools it needs to complete its Y2K preparations.

I believe we are making progress in reforming the IRS, and this appropriations bill gives Commissioner Rossotti the resources to continue these efforts. But make no mistake about it, Mr. Speaker. The Clinton Administration's continued failure to send a full slate of nominees for the new IRS Oversight Board to the Senate is a cause for very deep concern. I am deeply troubled by this continued failure—now eight months past the statutory deadline—and I believe it raises serious questions about this Administration's commitment to reforming this troubled agency. I strongly urge the Administration to stop delaying and send the IRS Oversight Board nominations to the Senate.

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Mr. HOYER. Mr. Speaker, I have no further requests for time, and I yield back the balance of my time.